

# A NOTE ON THE TOPOGRAPHY OF ANCIENT RĀJAGRIHA

By

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Rājagriha, which was the capital of the kingdom of Magadha from very early times, is represented by modern Rajgir in the south-eastern corner of the Patna District. Being the capital city of Magadha for centuries, it was known from time to time by different names. In the Indian literature it appears by several names such as Girivraja,<sup>1</sup> Rājagriha,<sup>2</sup> Vasumatī,<sup>3</sup> Kuśāgrapura,<sup>4</sup> Māgadhapura,<sup>5</sup> Bārhadrathapura<sup>6</sup>, and Bimbisārapura<sup>7</sup>. It was called Girivraja, because of its topographical situation. Girivraja means an enclosure of hills, or a pasture, or a fort in the middle of hills. It was a hill-girt city. According to *Sumaṅgalavūṭṭasīnī* it derived the name Rājagriha because of its being a royal seat.<sup>8</sup> Another interpretation is that Rājagriha means a prison for inimical kings. According to *Mahābhārata* Jarāsandha had imprisoned many kings. The *Rāmāyaṇa* calls it Vasumatī after the king Vasu, described as the founder of the city.<sup>9</sup> *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* calls it Kuśāgrapura, which is referred to by Yuan Chwang as *Ku-She-Ka-lo-pu-lo* and explained as derived from the excellent growth of the *Kuśa*

1. *Mahābhārata, Sabhāparva*, XXI. 3; *Samyutta Nikāya*, II. 185.

2. *Mahābhārata, Sabhāparva*, XXI. 40, *Vanaparva*, VI. 82, 104.

3. *Rāmāyaṇa, Bālakāṇḍa*, 32, 7.

4. *AMMK.*, LXIII; Watter's *Yuan Chwang*, II. 148-49.

5. *Mahābhārata, Sabhāparva*, XXI. 13.

6. *Ibid.*, XXIV. 44.

7. Law, B. C., *Life & Work of Buddhaghosha*, p. 87.

8. राजगहेति एवं नामके नगरे । तं हि मन्धातुमहागोविंदादीहि परिगृहीतत्ता राजगह  
ति बुद्धति ।

9. *Rāmāyaṇa, Bālakāṇḍa* XXXII. 7,

चके पुरवरं राजा वसुर्नाम गिरिजम् ।

एवा वसुमती नामवसोस्तस्य महात्मनः ॥



grass.<sup>10</sup> As the capital of Magadha, it was called the Māgadhapura, and as the residence of Bṛihadhratha, it derived the name Bārhadhrathapura. Jinaprabhāsūri refers to other names of the city as Kshitipratishṭha, Chaṇakapura, and Rishabhapura.<sup>11</sup> Though so many names are referred to, it is popular in the Indian literature by two names. i. e. Girivraja and Rājagriha.

Girivraja or Rājagriha had a peculiar geographical situation, which had added to its beauty. The Rāmāyana says, "It shines in the middle of the five hills".<sup>12</sup> The Mahābhārata says, "These five hills abounding in shady trees stand as if protecting the Girivraja. The city appears as if concealed in fragrant Lodhra forests and abounding with the Pippala and Nyagrodha trees."<sup>13</sup> Buddhaghoshā describes the city as a Giriparikkhēpa—a girdle of hills.<sup>14</sup> Fa-Hien refers to the city as a circular space formed by five hills which stand all round it, and have the appearance of the sub-urban wall of a city.<sup>15</sup> Yuan-Chwang describes it as the centre of Magadha, its old capital, the mountain city, having high hills forming its outer walls.<sup>16</sup>

According to one list of the Mahābhārata these five hills surrounding Girivraja were Vaihāra, Varāha, Rishabha, Rishigiri, and Chaityaka;<sup>17</sup> and according to other, Pāṇḍava, Vipula, Varāha, Chaityaka, and Mātanga. According to the Buddhist literature the five hills

10. Watter's Yuan Chwang II. 148.

11. Law, B. C., Rājagriha in Ancient Literature, p. 2.

12. Rāmāyana, Bālakāṇḍa, 32. 7.

एते वीलवराः पंच प्रकाशंते समंतता ।

13. Mbh., Sabhāparva, XXI. 3.

एते पञ्चमहाशृंगाः पर्वताः क्षीतलद्रुमाः ।

रक्षन्तीवामिसंहृत्य संहताङ्गा गिरिव्रजम् ॥

14. Law, B. C., Rājagriha in Ancient Literature, p. 21.

15. Legge's Fa-Hien, pp. 81-82.

16. Watter's Yuan Chwang, pp. 148, 156.

17. Mbh., Sabhāparva, XXI. 2.

वैहारो विपुलः वीलो बराहो वृषभस्तथा ।

तथा कषिगिरिस्तत् सुमाक्षैत्यकपञ्चमाः ॥



were Isigili, Vebhāra, Pāṇḍava, Vepulla and Gijjhakūṭa.<sup>18</sup> Modern names of the hills around Rajgir are Vaibhāra, Vipula, Ratna, Chhatṭhā, Śaila, Udaya and Sonā. Vaihāra is described as *Vipula Śailo*, hence Vaihāra and Vipula are identical, and the same as modern Vaibhāragiri, described in the *Jaina* inscriptions as Vaibhāra and Vyahāra.<sup>19</sup> Yuan Chwang calls it *Pi-Pu-lu* = Vipula.<sup>20</sup> The Chinese pilgrim tells us that once there had been 500 hot springs among which he saw several scores, some cold and some tepid.<sup>21</sup> Buddhaghosha associates hot springs with mt. Vaibhāra.<sup>22</sup> Hence *Pi-Pu-lu* of Yuan Chwang is Vaibhāragiri of today. Though it is difficult to identify ancient hill names, Dr. B. C. Law has identified them as Pāṇḍava = Vipula; Vepulla = Ratnagiri and Chhatṭhāgiri; Gijjhakūṭa = Udayagiri; and Isigili = Sonāgiri.<sup>23</sup>

Rājagṛīha was beautified by several delightful spots and parks such as Venūvana, Gijjhakūṭa, Moranivāpa, Pavārikāmravana on the bank of the Sappiniyā river, Tapodārama, Jivaka's Āmravana, Sītavana, Maddakuchchi, Gotama-nigrodha Chorapapāta, Sattapaṇṇiguhā, and Kāla-silā in Isigili.<sup>24</sup> These spots were visited not only by the citizens of the city, but also the wandering ascetics who used them as halting places. The Buddha also lived in most of these spots.

During the days of the Buddha, Rājagṛīha was called the Girivraja of the Magadhas. It was thus distinguished from the Girivraja of the Kekayas. Fa-Hien<sup>25</sup> and Yuan Chwang<sup>26</sup> speak of the old and the New Rājagṛīha. The former says that he visited New Rājagṛīha built by Ajātaśatru, which was a *yojana* to the west of the Village Nāla, the birth place of Sāriputta where he saw two monasteries. Huen Tsang records two traditions about the building of New Rājagṛīha. According to one, Bimbisāra built it, but the other tradition describes Ajātaśatru as the builder of New Rājagṛīha.<sup>27</sup>

18. *M. N.*, III. 68.

19. Cunningham, *Ancient Geography*, p. 530.

20. Watter's *Yuna Chwang*, II, p. 153.

21. *Ibid.*

22. Law, B. C., *Rājagṛīha in Ancient Literature*, p. 6.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *DN.* I. 49; II. 116-17; *Dia.* III. 123, *SBE* XI. 56; *MN.* I. 497, II. 1-22, 29-30, III. 13, *AN.* II. 29, 176, V. 196.

25. Legge's *Fa-Hien*, pp. 81-82.

26. Watter's *Yuan Chwang*, II, 161-62.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 162.



There are difficulties in accepting the tradition which describes Ajātaśatru as the builder of New Rājagriha, because he is known for the fortification of Pāṭaliputra. It is suggested that no new Rājagriha was built and that New Rājagriha is nothing but Pāṭaliputra.<sup>28</sup> Dr. B.C. Law suggests that New Rājagriha was nothing but the palace area.<sup>29</sup> The building of Rājagriha on a new plan is not unlikely. The plan of Rājagriha corresponds with the plan of the cities of Northern India of the 6th century B.C.<sup>30</sup> The Buddhist literature describes Mahāgovinda as the architect who planned Rājagriha and other cities of Northern India.<sup>31</sup> Rājagriha, known as Bimbisārapura also gives the suggestion of its being rebuilt by Bimbisāra. Hence, the possibility of the building of Rājagriha during the days of Bimbisāra on a new plan, cannot be put aside. But Carbon-14 dating of the New Fort at Rājagriha establishes that it was founded during the later Mauryan period,<sup>32</sup> which makes the building of a new Rājagriha either by Bimbisāra or Ajātaśatru quite unlikely. It may be concluded that Bimbisāra might have introduced certain changes in the old city, and that the site was not shifted to the fort area.

Buddhaghosha speaks of the inner and the outer cities of Rājagriha.<sup>33</sup> Probably the inner city was the palace area which is described by Fa-Hien as the old city of king Bimbisāra,<sup>34</sup> and as the Kuśāgrapura by Yuan Chwang.<sup>35</sup> The *Rājovāda Jātaka* describes the outer city as consisting of localities at the four gates (*Chatudvāragāma*).<sup>36</sup> According to Buddhaghosha Rājagriha had 32 main and 64 minor gates.<sup>37</sup> But in fact there were four main gates as suggested by various sources.<sup>38</sup> The ruins at modern Rājgir show that Rājagriha was protected by a strong rampart, with a circuit of about thirty-three miles. In the south-west corner of the fortified area was a citadel, protected by a stone wall, portions of which are still fairly well preserved.

28. Law, B. C., *Rājagriha in Ancient Literature*.

29. *Ibid.*

30. Percy Brown, *Indian Architecture*.

31. *Vimānavatthu Commentary*, p. 82.

32. *Indian Numismatic Chronicle*, Vol. III, part II, p. 139.

33. *Sāratthapakāsimi*, I, p. 313.

34. Legge's, *Fa-Hien* p. 82.

35. Watter's, *Yuan Chwang* II, 148.

36. *Jātaka*, II, 2.

37. Law, B. C., *Rājagriha in Ancient Literature*, p. 24.

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.